

Safe Sanctuary Policy

St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Midland, Texas

Our calling and our mandate include providing safe sanctuary for God's people. Throughout the gospels, Jesus provides teachings on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God's people. The peaceable kingdom begins with sanctuary, with refuge and protection. Scriptures provide examples of how sanctuary is to be a community of protective nurture and harmony (Psalms 20:1-2, 27:4-5). As Followers of Christ, we are called to create a safe sanctuary in our churches. They must be holy, safe, and protective communities for all of God's children, regardless of age or ability.

The purpose of this policy is to address the safety of all who enter the doors of St. Mark's United Methodist Church. St. Mark's recognizes the need to have a formal, written policy with procedures in place (1) to help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and the appearance of abuse and (2) to help protect individuals from false accusations and suspicions.

The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in hired staff, volunteers, or members of the congregation, but are intended to protect the entire church body. Careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information as needed, and to have an accurate record in the case of reported abuse.

Scope

For protection and well-being, this policy and its provisions shall apply to all paid and unpaid leaders, whether lay or clergy, who have any direct or indirect contact with people who participate in any activities or events held by St. Mark's United Methodist Church.

Children and Youth Safety

As a church, we believe that the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of children is vital. Church activities involving children and youth are consistent with the teachings and example of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the Christian tradition of nurturing children.

Definitions

- A **Leader** is someone who is twenty-one (21) years of age or older.
- An **Assistant Leader** is someone 18-20 years of age with a high school diploma or equivalent, who is supervised by a leader.
- A **Childcare Provider** is someone that is eighteen (18) years of age or older with a high school diploma or equivalent.
- A **Child** is anyone from birth, to the end of the 5th grade in school.

- A **Youth** is anyone from the 6th grade to the 12th grade in school.
- An **Adult** is anyone who is twenty-one (21) years of age or older.

All workers must be eighteen (18) years of age or older. Younger persons may assist, but they may not take the place of Leaders, Assistant Leaders, or Childcare Providers.

Supervision of nursery and childcare

As ambassadors of Jesus Christ, we must strive to be worthy of a very high standard of trust. For this reason, Childcare Providers should avoid even the appearance of inappropriate behavior.

- There shall be a minimum of two (2) Childcare Providers per room.
- Whenever possible, the following ratios of Childcare Providers to children shall be observed:

Specified Age Group of Children	Maximum Number Two Childcare Providers May Supervise
0 – 11 months	8
12 – 23 months	10
2 – 5 years	20
6 – 8 years	40
9 – 13 years	40

Supervision of children and youth events

Likewise, Leaders and Assistant Leaders of programs, events, classes and/or activities for children and/or youth shall avoid any appearance of inappropriate behavior. All Leaders and Assistant Leaders must diligently avoid any conduct that appears wrong to a reasonable observer, even if no actual misconduct takes place.

- Events designated for children and youth shall observe the “2 Leader Rule” (two leaders per classroom or two leaders within line of sight when outdoors) at all times.
- An exception to allow one (1) Leader and one (1) Assistant Leader may be made with the approval of the program Leader on a case-by-case basis.
- Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting of Children or Youth shall not be conducted “behind closed doors” or in an isolated area out of sight of another Leader.
- Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one Leader can be in contact with groups of three or more Youth so long as they are in line of sight of other Leaders.
- If both boys and girls are participants, then the Leaders shall also include both men and women.
- Unauthorized visitors will not be allowed to remain at the event.
- Children will not be allowed to leave a designated event early unless a parent or guardian accompanies them as they leave. Youth participants in an event will not be allowed to leave a designated event early without the permission of a parent or guardian.

Overnight Accommodations

At events that require overnight accommodations:

- It is strongly advised that in camp or dormitory type settings there be at least two (2) Leaders present with every group of Children/Youth.
- When staying in a hotel, Leaders shall sleep in separate rooms from Children/Youth. If necessary for Children/Youth to share a room with a Leader, Leaders shall sleep in separate beds from Children/Youth so long as any one Leader shall not be alone with any one Child or Youth.

Inclusion of children and youth at general events

- When children and youth participate in events oriented toward the entire church, adults shall not be alone with any one Child or Youth that is not a family member.
- Children will not be allowed to leave a designated event early unless a parent or guardian accompanies them as they leave. Youth participants in an event will not be allowed to leave a designated event early without the permission of a parent or guardian.

Screening for Leaders, Assistant Leaders, and Childcare Providers

Careful screening of applicants is one way to prevent the abuse of anyone. Screening calls for a careful gathering and review of information in search of those who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment.

For nursery, childcare, and programs for children or youth, each prospective applicant shall be screened prior to employment or acceptance as a Leader, Assistant Leader, or Childcare Provider (paid or unpaid). The Leader in charge of the program, event, or class shall direct each prospective applicant to complete the application/consent form. By signing the form, the applicant gives permission to the program Leader, church office, and/or members of the congregation designated by the program leader to contact references and perform the necessary investigation to review the application. Part of the application process shall be a criminal background check.

Should reports raise questions about the fitness of an applicant; the program Leader will disapprove the application. If the applicant (paid or unpaid) is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited anyone, the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction for a crime against a minor Child or Youth shall disqualify an applicant. St. Mark's United Methodist Church reserves the right to turn away any persons for service.

Results of applicant screenings shall be kept confidential.

Training

It is important that all Leaders (regardless of if they will be working directly with children and youth or not) be familiar with this policy. Each year, after Charge Conference, the Nominations and Leadership Development Committee will provide a copy of this policy to each leader.

The Nominations and Leadership Development Committee will work with the Staff, Pastor, Parish Relations Committee to develop, implement, and maintain training and orientation procedures for Childcare Providers and for Leaders and Assistant Leaders who work with children and youth. Training shall include but is not limited to appropriate discipline, appropriate physical and emotional boundaries, leader misconduct, and this policy. No person shall supervise nursery, childcare, and/or programs for children and/or youth until they have completed this training program and training must be recompleted every three years.

Definitions of Abuse

- **Verbal Abuse** is voiced act that humiliates degrades or threatens any Child or Youth.
- **Physical Abuse** is an act or omission that endangers a person's physical or mental health. In the case of physical abuse of a Child or Youth, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual's parent, guardian or other caregiver. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly aggressive or inappropriate considering the individual's age and/or physical or mental condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose a serious danger to the physical health of a Child or Youth.
- **Sexual Abuse** of a Child or Youth is the sexual exploitation or use of a Child or Youth for the satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - 1) Incest;
 - 2) Rape;
 - 3) Prostitution;
 - 4) Romantic involvement;
 - 5) Sexual intercourse, or sexual contact;
 - 6) Behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content.

Examples are not limited to: Communicating sexual interest via an internet chat room, myspace/Facebook type accounts, or e-mail; displaying sexually suggestive visual materials; making sexual comments or innuendo about one's own or another person's body; touching another person's body, hair or clothing; touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person; kissing; and sexual intercourse. (#36 Book of Resolutions 2004).

Reporting of Incidents

- 1) When a Leader of program, event, class, or activity suspects that abuse is taking or has taken place, he or she must call 911 and report the abuse to the appropriate local law

enforcement agency and/or the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400). The Leader shall cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.

- 2) The Leader shall contact the program Leader immediately. If the event Leader is the person suspected of abuse (respondent), then the report should be made to the Pastor.
- 3) Address any needs the alleged victim may have, medical or otherwise. With the consent of law enforcement, report to the alleged victim's parent(s) and/or legal guardians(s).
- 4) The respondent shall, for the safety and well-being of the alleged victim, be removed with dignity from further contact with the alleged victim until an appropriate investigation has taken place. The matter shall remain confidential.
- 5) Following the report of an incident, the program Leader or Pastor shall document the report in cooperation with the appropriate authorities and their procedures.
- 6) All such conversations shall be documented. Careful and confidential documentation is essential. The documentation should include the following:
 - a) The name of the Leader observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including the date, time and place and any action taken by this person.
 - b) The alleged victim's name, age, and date of birth.
 - c) Any statement made by the alleged victim.
 - d) Name of the person suspected of abuse (respondent), the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the person suspected of abuse (respondent).
 - e) Any action taken, i.e. suspension of the respondent.
 - f) The date and time of any call to the appropriate agency, name of worker spoken to, content of that conversation and case number assigned.
 - g) The date and time of any call to a law enforcement agency, the name of officer spoken to and content of that conversation.
 - h) Date and time of any other contacts made regarding this incident.
- 7) The Pastor should be notified if not previously informed as should the Big Spring District Superintendent or the Bishop of the Northwest Texas Conference.
- 8) Inform the church's insurance carrier.

It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the alleged victim and the respondent and to restore such persons to wholeness. Supportive care can include the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions of the current Book of Discipline, appropriate counseling referrals, and continued pastoral visitation.

Confirmed reports of proven incidents of abuse shall be retained by the church office (and kept confidential) for future screening purposes.

Approved by the Church Council on June 2, 2019.